

Grizzly Bears in the Greater Yellowstone

On July 28, 1975, under the authority of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) as a threatened species. At that time, an estimated 200 or fewer grizzly bears roamed the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA). Today, there are an estimated 400-600 grizzlies in the GYA. The number of adult breeding females has grown from less than 30 in 1983 (the first year this sub-population was estimated) to over 100 today. With more bears who need to establish home ranges, the bears have begun reoccupying areas in their historic range where they had been absent for more than 40 years.

In 1983, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) was formed with members from the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and the states of Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming. For each of the six ecosystems where grizzly bears could occur, an IGBC subcommittee focuses on specific management actions with the goal of ensuring adequate numbers of bears and suitable habitat for sustaining recovered populations. For the Yellowstone Ecosystem, grizzly bear management is coordinated by the Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee (YES). Members include the line officers from each of the GYCC units, representatives from the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team.

The threatened status led to implementation of a grizzly bear recovery plan as required under the Endangered Species Act. The first *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* was developed in 1982 and was last updated in 1993. Management standards and guidelines for grizzly bears and their habitat are outlined in the recovery plans. Recovery activities include public education, reduction in bear access to food and garbage, evaluation of road densities, research on availability of grizzly foods, and studies of bears and their habitats. The objective of the recovery plan is to achieve self-sustaining populations in the wild that no longer need protection under the ESA.

Three goals must be achieved for two consecutive years before the grizzly bear population is considered recovered:

1. To have an average of 15 adult females with cubs of the year on a 6-year running average inside the recovery zone and within a 10-mile area surrounding the recovery zone.
2. To have 16 of 18 recovery zone Bear Management Areas occupied by females with young from a running 6-year sum of observations; no two adjacent areas shall

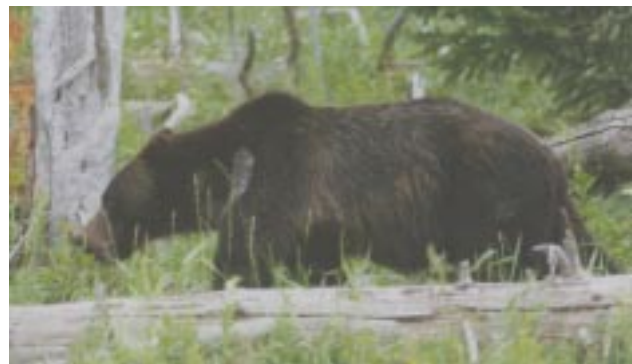
be unoccupied.

3. The known human-caused mortality shall not exceed 4 percent of the population estimate based on the most recent three-year sum of females with cubs minus known, adult female deaths. In addition, no more than 30 percent of the known human-caused mortality shall be females. These mortality limits cannot be exceeded during any two consecutive years.

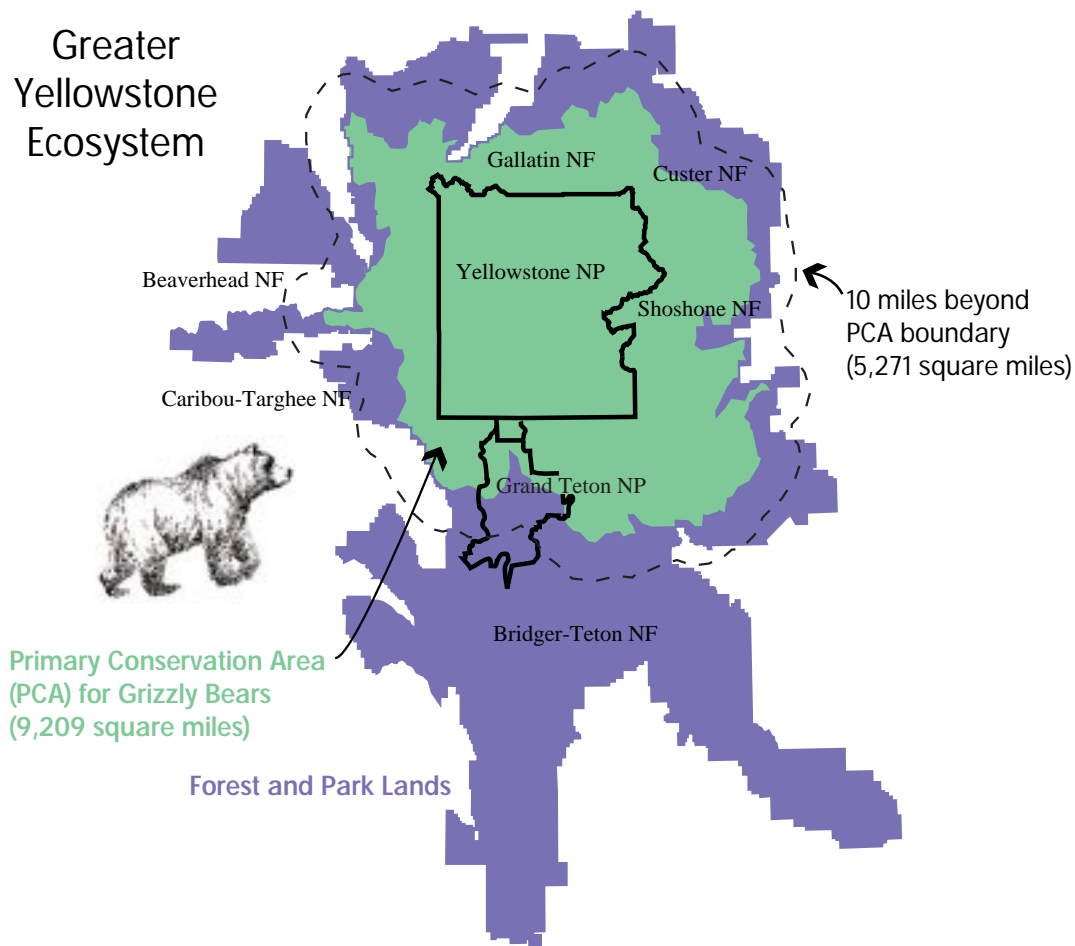
Currently the recovery goals are being met. Hunter-caused mortality has increased consistently over the past several years. YES has convened a working group to explore ways to reduce mortality.

Management of grizzly bears in the Yellowstone area uses the best currently available methods to assure a healthy population of grizzly bears—close monitoring of the population and habitat, and responding when necessary with management actions when human conflicts occur. This includes an ongoing program to inform the public how to live, work, and recreate in bear country, such as through proper food storage and management of bird feeders in bear country, when and how to use pepper spray instead of firearms, how to avoid human-bear conflicts, and management of road densities and other methods of access to minimize impacts to grizzlies and their habitat.

The Yellowstone population of grizzlies is getting close to recovery. There are still several steps that must be accomplished under the *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan*, before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would consider proposing “delisting” for the Yellowstone population. One of the most important steps is finalizing the interagency Conservation Strategy, which is a comprehensive plan for how the states and federal agencies in grizzly country will monitor and manage this population after delisting. The purpose of this Conservation Strategy is to:



Grizzly bear.



The Primary Conservation Area above is used in the draft *Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bears in the Yellowstone Ecosystem*, the interagency plan for managing and monitoring a recovered population of grizzlies in the Yellowstone area.

1. Describe and summarize the coordinated efforts to manage the grizzly bear population and its habitat, and the public education/involvement efforts that will be applied to ensure continued conservation of the grizzly bear in the GYA; and
2. Document the regulatory mechanisms that exist to maintain the Yellowstone population as recovered through the legal authorities, policy, guidelines, management programs, monitoring programs, and the commitment of participating agencies.

Public comment on the draft Conservation Strategy has occurred. Public comments will be incorporated into the final Conservation Strategy, anticipated late in 2001 or early in 2002.

There are several other actions that must be taken by the states and federal land and wildlife management agencies before Recovery Plan implementation can be considered completed. For example adequate regulatory mechanisms must be in place to sustain a recovered population.

The Service will not consider proposing delisting until these mechanisms, required by the delisting criteria of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), are in place.

For example, agencies may have to make changes to their management plans to correspond with the final habitat-based criteria, which will be both appended to the Recovery Plan and incorporated into the final Conservation Strategy. Also, the Recovery Plan calls for states to legally control non-regulated shooting of grizzlies, in order to sustain recovered populations.

Whenever the Service publishes a delisting proposal, public comments are accepted and considered; it is usually about a one-year process from a proposal to the final decision about whether or not to delist a species.

For additional information, go to:

<http://www.r6.fws.gov/endspp/grizzly/>

<http://www.fs.fed.us/wildlife/igbc/>

<http://www.nrmcs.usgs.gov/research/igbst-home.htm>